

Middleton High School

4801 N. 22nd Street

Tampa, FL 33610

Principal: Owen Young

Highlights

- Middleton’s successful turnaround approach is rooted in coordinated and collaborative efforts from state, district, and school stakeholders.
- The state and district developed teams of experts to conduct initial assessments at Middleton and to contribute to an action plan to address its challenges.
- The school focused on improving its climate and culture, believing that the school staff, students, and parents—as well as the greater community—had to see the school’s commitment to positive change in order to invest themselves in the turnaround process.
- Middleton staff also focused on improving student attendance by addressing safety concerns and increasing the number of more popular elective classes scheduled at the beginning of the school day.
- The school implemented a number of instructional changes aimed at increasing student involvement, engagement, and, ultimately, achievement.
- Although the school is now considered a successful turnaround case, Middleton maintains its sense of urgency and its dedication to continuous improvement.
- State and district support is ongoing, with continued strategic allocation of resources and personnel to help the school maintain its success.

Introduction

Middleton High School opened in 1934 to serve African American students in the then-segregated schools of Tampa, Florida. It was closed in 1971 and reopened as a grades 9–12 high school in 2002.

From 2002 to 2008, Middleton received a grade of D on the state report card and received a designation of *Intervene* from the state. The school also struggled with attendance and behavior, with as many as 9,000 reported behavioral instances each year. In 2008,

- ◆ Grades 9–12
- ◆ 1360 Students
- ◆ 74% Black
- ◆ 14% Hispanic
- ◆ 11% White
- ◆ 1% Asian
- ◆ 76% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- ◆ 6% English Language Learners
- ◆ 22% Special Education
- ◆ Schoolwide Title I

Owen Young was appointed principal as part of the school's turnaround effort. Middleton was a Cohort 1 SIG school using the transformation model.

A Coordinated Strategy

The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) and Hillsborough County Schools used a coordinated strategy that applied expertise and knowledge at both levels to facilitate Middleton's turnaround. The FLDOE Bureau of School Improvement operates five differentiated accountability regions for providing state support for school turnaround. The regional executive director serving Hillsborough County provided direct support for the turnaround effort. She is supported by a team of content specialists in reading, math, science, and response to intervention (RtI). This District Support Team (DST) played an important role in supporting the turnaround. The team also comprises instructional coaches, human resources personnel, a secondary-level administrator, and the district director of secondary education.

The DST, along with Middleton school staff, began by conducting instructional reviews to identify the biggest challenges the school was facing. They collected data using multiple avenues including:

- Reviewing achievement, behavior, and attendance data;
- Holding interviews with teachers, students, and parents; and
- Conducting classroom walkthroughs.

From there, they developed an action plan that included next steps for state, district, and school personnel to take to address the observed challenges. The team used this action plan to develop the larger school improvement plan, which serves as a "living document" to guide the turnaround activities that take place.

A major concern of the district and state turnaround support has been ensuring that they send the school a cohesive message. This includes consistent terminology and clear instructions among the different entities about the work they are doing. The support team also strives for consistent actions. Rather than visiting the school once or twice to prescribe changes and then never returning, these individuals are part of an ongoing team of support. As a result, instead of appearing redundant or intrusive, the state and district are viewed as complementary parts to school personnel's efforts to improve Middleton.

Climate and Culture

In addition to instructional changes, the state support team and school leadership directly addressed the school's climate and culture. Throughout the greater community, the school was seen as a bottom dweller, a self-fulfilling prophecy that Principal Young saw lived out within the school's walls among the teachers and students. He engaged the school in outreach efforts, including trash pick-up days and a breakfast event for local church leaders, to connect the school with the

community. In addition, he met with local law enforcement to come up with strategies for a cooperative relationship between law enforcement and the school's students. The principal also transferred his daughter to the school during her 10th-grade year, communicating that if the school was good enough for his daughter, it was good enough for other children as well.

Within the school itself, students and staff engaged in what Principal Young described as “tearing away the aspects of despair.” Principal Young was appointed the principal of Middleton in 2009. After his arrival, he engaged teachers in the school advisory committee, which decided on additional turnaround efforts. Furthermore, the Parent-Teacher-Student Association became one of the school's most powerful and engaged stakeholder groups. Principal Young says the community now views the school “as a microcosm of itself,” seeing its value represented within the school community among both students and school staff. He sees that a reciprocal relationship has developed, in which the community invests by providing out-of-school supports to prepare students to succeed in school, and in turn the school provides opportunities to prepare students to become valuable community members.

Increasing Attendance and Engagement

School leadership also made a concerted effort to increase student attendance and engagement. First, as part of moving to an A/B block schedule, they began offering elective courses, such as barbering and construction (which have greater appeal to the students), at the very beginning of the day. This was an intentional effort to get students to school in the morning, with the hope that teachers can keep them engaged throughout the school day. Second, they bought golf carts, which they use not only to transport students across the school's 55 acres between classes, but also to get them safely to and from school. Furthermore, they added two police officers to further ensure safety at the school.

The school worked to strengthen instruction and student engagement to keep students in school all day and to encourage achievement. As part of this focus, the school implemented lesson study whereby the principal and teachers observe lessons, concentrating on the students and their level of engagement. They also speak directly with students about what they are doing and ask them to describe and demonstrate their understanding of the concepts they are studying. The teachers use this information to make decisions about instructional practice. All of these components are intended to help the teachers move from a “congenial” to a “collegial” approach to continue to improve their practice with regard to student engagement.

Evidence of Success

The school and district maintain a shared sense of dedication to a continuous model of improvement, even as Middleton is no longer in *Intervene* status. State and district stakeholders visit regularly to conduct school walkthroughs, classroom observations, and data analysis in partnership with school staff. The DST provides resources and other supports to build additional

capacity to strengthen sustainability. In addition, the state continues to offer the support of its team's expertise as needed.

All of these stakeholders share credit for the turnaround that Middleton has achieved. Almost as soon as the scheduling changes were implemented, attendance rates increased, both in the elective classes and throughout the school day. In addition, Middleton achieved a grade of B from the state in 2013 and had an overall increase in school grade points of 175. Specific to student achievement, reading scores increased from 33 to 44 percent proficient from 2011 to 2013. Finally, the graduation rate increased by 9 percent and by 13 percent among at-risk students. These gains, coupled with positive climate changes, have led Principal Young to proclaim that one would “never know that the school was once struggling.”